NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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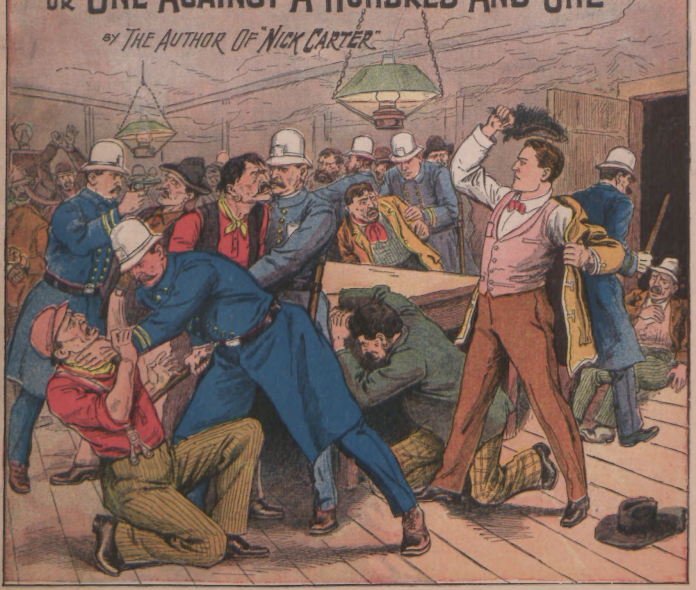
THE BLACK HAND'S NEMESIS

OR ONE AGAINST A HUNDRED AND ONE

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



"You all know me!" he shouted. "I am Nick Carter! The game is up! Your chief is a prisoner. Surrender; all of you."

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THE BLACK HAND'S NEMESIS;

OR,

One Against a Hundred and One.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

NICK CARTER'S LITTLE SCHEME.

The interior of a prison—the famous Tombs, of New York City.

But that, of itself, is not the strange part of the scene which presents itself to our attention.

The remarkable thing is that one of the prisoners is Nick Carter.

It is true—quite true.

Nick Carter, the great detective, is behind prison-bars, and in one sense at least he is as much a prisoner as any other one of the many that are detained behind those walls.

We find ourselves asking how this could be; how such a condition of things could have come about—and the answer is obvious to those who are acquainted with the detective, and who pause a moment to think.

"Nick Carter could not be there; he could not be incarcerated behind prison walls, unless it were done with his own free will and accord," we murmur to ourselves. "The fact that he is there is—must be—proof positive that the condition is part and parcel with some plan of his; with some scheme to capture wrong-doers."

The conjecture is a correct one.

He is there of his own free will and accord.

He is there because his being there is a part and parcel of one of his masterly plans.

He is there because, by being there for a time and representing himself as one who has transgressed the law as much as any of the others who are behind the bars, he hopes to accomplish that which will enable him to place the dreaded society of the Black Hand where it will be forever shorn of its terrible power.

He has constituted himself the Black Hand's Nemesis.

He proposes to follow that association of blackmailers and murderers, with all its untold numbers in membership, to prison and to death.

If we were permitted to look back over the records that are kept in his office, we would find one of them that is entered as "Bellini, of the Black Hand"; and we would find there how Nick Carter so ingratiated himself into the confidence of one of the many "groups" of which the society is composed, that he became almost the chief of that particular set.

We would find his chief assistant, Chick, assisted him in the work; how both left the city of New York together; how they traveled to Chicago; how, in that city, they mysteriously disappeared; how they reappeared disguised as Italians—and so perfectly disguised that either of them might have been stripped naked, and examined, and none would have believed that they were other than what they appeared—Italians.

We would find how they left Chicago, going in different directions; how Nick traveled by way of Norfolk, Virginia, and finally arrived in New York via one of the Old Dominion steamers; how Chick went around by way of Montreal, and also ultimately reached New York.

We would find how the detective lived for a considerable time at a restaurant that was kept by an Italian, named Mercodatti, in Grand Street; and how, from that place he presently became associated with one of the groups of the Black Hand—one of which the man, Mercodatti, was the chief; and how the detective was himself known by the name of Marco Spada.

We would find how he was induced to join that group; how one Michael Pelluria approached him on the subject; how he was finally conducted to the place of meeting by a beautiful young woman, Lucia Bellini by name, the daughter of the acknowledged head of all the societies.

We would know more than that, for we would understand how the beautiful Lucia confided in the detective, and how he constituted himself her protector; and how, when Mercodatti attempted to abduct her, she was rescued by the detective.

All that we would know if it were possible for us to inspect those records in his office; and one thing more as well.

We would find that Chick posed for a time as a rich Italian banker, and for that reason was selected by the Black Hand for one of its victims; that he was taken as a prisoner to an old mansion in the Bronx in order that he might be tortured into consenting to give up to the terrible society a great part of his supposed wealth.

But it happened that Nick Carter, in his capacity as a prominent member of the Black Hand, was appointed as chief of the torturers—and that the detective had planned accordingly, so that, when he was supposed to be in the very act of applying the heated irons to the flesh of the prisoner, the doors of the place were suddenly broken open, and the cellar in which the torture was to be undergone was instantly filled with blue-coated policemen.

All that would bring us very near to the real beginning of our story.

Nick Carter was arrested along with the others who were in that cellar.

He had stained his skin to a swarthy hue; he had permitted his mustache to grow, and had kept that—and also his hair, which was at that time quite long—dyed as black as the wing of a raven.

He looked Italian, acted Italian, refused to speak any language but Italian—and to all intent and purpose, as far as the officers who were not in the secret were concerned, was one.

With the others—there were eighteen in all—he was taken away from that house in the Bronx, a prisoner.

With the man who was called Pelluria, he was locked up in the Tombs—they were placed in adjoining cells—and remained there forty-eight hours.

Then there came a change.

One of the turnkeys of the Tombs entered Nick's cell late at night, and, with the gruff remark, "you're wanted!" hurried him away along the galleries and corridors until he led him finally to the street, and assisted him rather roughly to climb into a prison-van—known to the elect as the "Black Maria"—after which the door was closed and locked, and the turnkey went away again.

But he was not long gone.

After a short lapse of time, he returned, and this time, when he opened the door, Pelluria was pushed roughly into the van, and the door was again closed and locked, and the vehicle began a rumbling journey through the streets.

The interior of the van was as black as ink; not a ray of light strayed into it, and for several moments the prisoners were silent, for, although Nick Carter was perfectly well aware of the identity of his companion, he also knew that Pelluria had no idea who he was.

It was for this reason that he left the onus of being the first one to break the silence to the Italian, to Pelluria, for he knew that the Italian would finally become curious, and would then ask who his companion was, and if he knew where they were being taken,

And at last—in the English language—Pelluria asked the long-expected question.

"Who are you?" he asked.

And Nick replied instantly in Italian; and he spoke as if he were overjoyed because he recognized the voice of a friend.

"Pelluria!" he cried out. "Is it indeed you? Good! Very good! Your voice tells me that I am not mistaken. It is indeed you!"

"Spada!" exclaimed Pelluria, in his turn.

"Yes," said Nick.

"How does it happen that we are here—and together?" asked Pelluria.

"That is beyond me," returned Nick.

"Where are they taking us?"

"To another prison, doubtless."

"But where?"

"We will have to use our eyes when we get out, and see if we can determine that."

"I wonder why they have taken us from the Tombs."

"Probably to separate us from our friends."

Pelluria was silent for a moment, and then he said:

"Perhaps, in another prison, there may be a chance for us to escape."

"We can at least hope so," replied Nick.

"You have thought of escape, then?"

"I have thought of nothing else since we were captured."

"And have you a plan?"

"I had one, but this move has spoiled it. Possibly I can think of another."

"And will your plan, whatever it may be, include me, Spada?"

"I never desert my friends, Pelluria."

"Then you cherish no ill will against me?"

"Why should I do that?"

"I did not know but you might have held me responsible for the actions of Mercodatti. You know he drew a revolver on you at the meeting, that first night you were there, and, although I was present, I did not interfere."

"Bah! That is nothing."

"I have thought that perhaps you held it against me."

"Then know at once that I do not."

"Thank you, Spada."

"If I can perfect a plan of escape, you shall go with me."

"Thank you again."

"It is nothing. Do not mention it."

"Can you not guess to what place we are being taken?"

"I have heard that there is another jail in Ludlow Street."

"I have heard that, also."

"If that is our destination, I think there is hope for us."

"To escape?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"It will certainly be a much easier place to get out of than the Tombs."

"Do you know that?"

"I am positive of it. I had an acquaintance who was there once."

"And did he escape?"

"No; he was set at liberty; but he told me that he could have escaped had he been detained there much longer."

"Then there is hope for us?"

"There certainly is."

"Then it is fortunate that they have changed our place of imprisonment."

"I think it is—decidedly."

"Will you know the prison in Ludlow Street when you see it?"

"I can ask the man who releases us from this wagon."

"Perhaps he will not reply."

"Why should he not do so?"

"Because, it may be possible that we have been brought here so that the authorities can have us secretly murdered. You know——"

Nick Carter burst into laughter.

"That sort of thing is not done in this country, Pelluria," he said. "In Italy, it is sometimes done; in Russia it is done frequently; but in America—never!"

"It was what I feared."

"Then let your mind be at rest. The thing is not done in this country, ever."

Pelluria breathed a hearty sigh of relief, and Nick Carter smiled to himself.

"The game is playing into my hands," he thought. "I wonder what Pelluria would say if he knew that his escape was already arranged?"

CHAPTER II.

THE FAMOUS "HUNDRED AND ONE."

Presently, after having turned numerous corners and journeyed through several streets, the unwieldy vehicle came to a stop, and the two prisoners inside could hear the driver as he got down from his porch and walked away.

"Spada!" exclaimed Pelluria breathlessly.

"What is it?" asked Nick in reply.

"Why would not this be as good a time as any?"

"For what?"

"To make our escape."

"How could we do it?"

"Will you attempt it if I will?"

"Yes."

"Then, suppose that there should be only two men to let us out of this place, and take us to the interior of the prison."

"Well?"

"We will attack them."

"When they open the door, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"It will be a risky piece of business, Pelluria."

"I know that; but we must take the risk. We may never have as good a chance."

"That is true."

"Will you make the attempt?"

"If there are only two men—yes; but suppose there are three—or four?"

"In that case it would be hopeless," murmured Pelluria.

"I am not so sure of that," replied the supposed Spada.

"Do you mean that you would dare to make the attack even if there were four of them?"

"Yes. Why not? Since you have put the idea into my head, I am in for it. We cannot be any worse off than we are now if we fail—and we might succeed."

"That is true."

"Besides, you know, Pelluria, that I am very strong. You saw evidence of that once, when I threw Mercodatti over your head."

"Yes."

"Then shall we make the attack, no matter how many of them there are here when they open the door of the wagon?"

"Yes."

"Will you do your part?"

"Yes. I wish I had a knife, or a pistol."

"We will have to do without those," said Nick. "Hark!"

"Do you hear them coming?"

"Yes."

"Can you tell how many there are?"

There was silence inside the van for a moment, while both prisoners listened intently; and then the detective replied:

"I think there are three."

"The driver, and two men from the prison?"

"Yes; the driver is one of them. I know his step."

"What shall we do?"

"Get close to the door—you on that side of the van, I on this."

"Yes."

"When they open the door, I will go first. I will step out very quietly. I will not let them suppose that we have any idea of escape; but, the moment I have my feet firmly on the ground, I will strike out. I am sure that I can lay out two of them. If I succeed, you jump past us, and run for it, while I take care of the third man also."

"Can you do all that, Spada?"

"I can but try."

"And I am to run, and not offer to help you?"

"Yes; unless you see that I am fighting against two. But I don't think that will be the case. I think I will surprise them so greatly that they will be easy."

"And, if I run, where shall I go?"

"Wait on the next corner for me. I know a place where we can hide, and defy them all."

"Good! I will do as you say."

"Hush, now! They are here."

They could hear the men outside fumbling with the lock of the door, and presently it swung open on its hinges.

Three men stood just outside, awaiting them, and a gruff voice called out:

"Come out of that—you!"

Nick Carter reached out across the van, and grasped Pelluria by the arm. Then he gave it a reassuring squeeze, and passed on out of the vehicle.

But his feet had scarcely touched the ground before he acted.

From inside the van, Pelluria could not see all that happened, for they had all stepped a little to one side; but he heard what seemed to him to be the noise of two resounding and terrific blows, delivered in quick succession; and these were instantly followed by the sounds of a fierce struggle.

Pelluria leaped to the ground then, and he saw that two of the men—both officers who had come out of the prison, in fact—were stretched apparently senseless upon the pavement, and that his friend Spada was engaged in a fierce struggle with the driver of the van.

For an instant Pelluria hesitated.

His impulse was to go to the assistance of his companion; but then he heard Spada's voice call out authoritatively to him:

"Run, Pelluria! Do as I told you!"

He obeyed.

He flew down the street as fast as his legs would carry him, nor did he stop until he arrived at the corner.

There, however, he halted and listened; and, as he did so, a smile dawned upon his face, for he could hear the rapid approach of steps, and he had not the least doubt that they were made by the man whom he addressed as Spada.

Then, in a moment more, he found that he was right, for his late companion of the van appeared in view, and in an instant more dashed past him.

"Run, Pelluria!" said the detective breathlessly. "Follow me."

After that they both ran, up one street and down another, until finally Nick came to a full stop, and put out his hand to detain Pelluria.

"We can take it easy now," he said.

"But they may overtake us yet, Spada," objected Pelluria.

"Bah! They will not know which direction we took."

"They might have seen you when you ran."

"My dear Pelluria, they will not any of them see anything for a couple of hours, at least."

"Do you mean——?"

"I mean that I knocked them out, as they call it in this country."

"All of them?"

"Every one of them."

"You are a wonder, Spada."

"Yes; I have been told that before."

"But are we not foolish to stand here waiting?"

"No; we are wise."

"How so?"

"Because, at the present moment, we appear to anybody who might pass by as if we had just met in the street, and had stopped to talk together. Nobody will think that we are a pair of escaped prisoners."

"That is true."

"And, on the other hand, if officers were to come in this direction, and see us standing here, they would merely ask if we had seen two men running. It would not occur to them that we were the men they were after."

"You are very wise, Spada."

"Yes."

"But how long shall we stand here in this way? It makes me uneasy."

"We will move along slowly now."

"But where to? You said you knew of a hiding-place."

"I do."

"Where is it?"

"I will take you to it. It is near the Italian quarter."

"But that is precisely where the police will look for us."

"No. It is there where we will be safest."

"You think so?"

"Yes."

"Tell me about this room. How do you know about it?"

They were walking deliberately along, side by side now. Pelluria was extremely nervous, and kept glancing up and down the street, and from side to side as they advanced; but his companion, Spada, seemed to be as cool as if he were not an escaped criminal.

"It is a room that I hired when I first came to the city," replied Nick, which was the entire truth. "But I did not use it for a long time. I preferred to live in the restaurant of Mercodatti—and, more, I wished to keep the room as a secret place, to which I could go and hide if I had to do so."

"You think we will be safe there?"

"I am sure of it."

"But we will not dare to venture into the streets."

"No?" Nick chuckled audibly. "And why not?"

"Our pictures will be in the papers. A reward will be offered for us. We will not dare to trust anybody. Even our own countrymen——"

"Pish, Pelluria! By this time to-morrow, I will have disguised you and myself so thoroughly that I will wager that you could go to police headquarters, and show yourself to all of the policemen in the city, and not one of them would know you."

"Can you do that, Spada?"

"Surely I can do it. I can fix you up so that you can go on the street, or wherever you care to go, and that without the least danger of being arrested."

"Ah, Spada, I found a friend indeed when I found you."

"Perhaps. We will see about that later."

"Why? I could not have escaped without you."

"Possibly not."

"I owe my liberty to you."

"Don't talk about that."

"Some day I will repay the debt."

"Bah! Forget it. All that we want to do now is to ally ourselves with another group of the Black Hand."

"We will do that without delay."

"Yes; but it must be a good one this time."

"It shall be the best and the largest in the city—in all America, in fact. I am already a member of it."

"You are?"

"Yes. It is called 'The Hundred and One.' You have heard of it?"

"Heard of it—yes; but——"

"But you never hoped to become a member of it, did you? And yet, after what you have done for me to-night, there will be no trouble about that at all. You shall be a member of the 'Hundred and One.'"

CHAPTER III.

THE CHIEF OF THE WHOLE BLACK HAND.

"Tell me about the 'Hundred and One,' as we walk along," said the detective. "We have yet some distance to go."

"You must already know about it, Spada."

"Yes; but tell me what you know about it."

"Ah! It is the cream of all our groups. An applicant will never be accepted as a member until he has performed some great deed to render him eligible."

"And you did that?"

"Yes; I forced the Prince de Calabria to pay us a hundred thousand dollars at one payment, and then, because he refused to pay a second amount of the same size, I killed him. That was in Italy. I was sent over there for the purpose. I did it, and was never even suspected, and for that, they made me a member of the 'Hundred and One.'"

"Ah! But that was great. But what of me? I have never done anything so grand as that."

"Yes, you have—to-night."

"The 'Hundred and One' may not recognize what I have done to-night."

"You have saved one of its members from prison and death."

"Is that sufficient?"

"Quite."

"Then I can become a member?"

"On my recommendation—when I have told them about you—yes."

"Then, Pelluria, you will have paid your debt of gratitude to me."

"It shall be paid, then, to-morrow night."

"Good. Now tell me more about the 'Hundred and One.'"

"What more?"

"Why is it called by that name?"

"Because the limit of membership is one hundred and one."

"Suppose the membership is full?"

"I happen to know that it is not. It never is."

"Ah!"

"The membership is one hundred; the one extra is the chief."

"Who is he, Pelluria?"

"Let me whisper it to you."

Pelluria leaned close to the detective, and whispered in his ear:

"He is a Bellini."

"But," said Nick, "I thought there was but one Bellini alive, and he is an invalid—the father of Lucia."

"That is true in a sense. He is the Bellini; the head of the family in direct descent."

"Then who is this one you speak of?"

"He is a Bellini, but he is only a distant relation. He calls himself Cagliostro."

"A fitting name," murmured the detective.

"Yes; a good one."

"And is there nothing else that you can tell me about this group, Pelluria? The more you tell me now, the better fitted I will be to become a member."

"That is true."

"Then tell me all you know—or, at least, all that you are at liberty to tell."

"You know, of course," said Pelluria slowly, "that the society of the Black Hand spreads all over the world?"

"Yes; I know that, of course."

"And that it was originally a political society only?"

"Yes."

"When it was a political society, there was a committee of a hundred and one appointed to manage the affairs of the whole body—and there were at that time supposed to be exactly one hundred groups dependent upon it."

"Yes; I understand."

"From each one of the groups a delegate was sent. He was elected by his own group."

"Yes."

"When those hundred men got together, they organized themselves into an administrative body, and called themselves by the name of 'Bellini's Home.'"

"Ah!"

"Then, from the society at large, they elected a president, or chief."

"Not from among their own immediate number, eh?"

"No; that was against the rule."

"But the chief was elected by those hundred men, from the society at large? Is that it?"

"That is it exactly. That is why they were called the 'Hundred and One.'"

"I see."

"Well, this custom has survived always; but with the difference that, because now there are so many groups all over the world—you know that now they number in the thousands—the members of the 'Hundred and One' are elected to the body instead of being sent to it; and now, a man has to perform some great deed before he is eligible."

"I understand."

"Do you also know that every group in the Black Hand pays a tribute to the 'Hundred and One?'"

"Yes; I understand that much."

"But you did not know, did you, that the 'Hundred and One' keeps a record of every group in the world, and knows all about the affairs of every one, no matter where it is located?"

"No; I did not know that."

"It is true."

"Who keeps that record?"

"The 'One.'"

"Who?"

"The 'One.'"

"I do not understand you."

"That is the title by which the chief is known among us. There are the hundred, and there is the one; the 'Hundred and One.'"

"Ah! I see it now."

"He is a great man, Spada."

"What does he have to do, Pelluria?"

"Do? He has nothing to do, save to command us all."

"He must have an easy time of it."

"Aye, he does that. The society at large has to pay him an income of twenty-five thousand dollars a year. He lives in state and style. He keeps servants and secretaries, horses, and automobiles."

"And he is elected to his office for how long?"

"For life."

"Until he dies, eh?"

"Yes."

"And then——? What happens then?"

"The 'Hundred' get together, and elect a new chief."

"Who must not be one of themselves?"

"Oh, yes; under the present rules, he must be one of them."

"How old a man is this Bellini cousin?"

"He is nearly eighty. He is very old. It is said that he is not well; that he may die at any time."

"And if he should die—who would take his place?"

"It is not known. Nobody can tell. There was talk

of Mercodatti once; but now, since he attempted to abduct Lucia Bellini, and has since disappeared, he stands no chance."

"Of course not."

"I should not wonder if the 'Hundred and One' have condemned him to death by this time. I have not attended a meeting there since it all happened; but we will know to-morrow night."

"Good. Where do they meet, Pelluria?"

"I may not tell you that until you are initiated."

"Ah! Is there, then, an initiation?"

"Yes."

"A severe one?"

"Quite—but you can pass through it all right."

"There is an oath, too, I suppose?"

"You sign your true name in a book with a pen dipped in your own blood; that is all."

"And after that you are a member?"

"Yes."

"I am glad that I assisted you to escape to-night; otherwise, I might never have had an opportunity to join the 'Hundred and One.'"

"It is true that you might not."

"We are approaching the place where my room is," said Nick then.

"I am glad, for I am tired, and I am also nervous lest we be seen and known."

"Here we are. Run up these steps. Good. Now, follow me."

The detective led the way up two flights of stairs, and presently unlocked a door on the third room of the house.

"It is here," he said. "See!"

He turned a switch inside the door, and thus started half-a-dozen incandescent lights; and Pelluria paused just inside the room in amazement.

"I had no idea that you had such a place as this, Spada," he said; for the room, although on the top floor of a sorry-looking house located in a third-rate quarter of the city, was furnished luxuriantly.

"You did not know that I was rich," said Nick, smiling.

"No."

"But, surely, you have never heard of a Spada who was poor, have you?"

"That is true. The Spadas are all rich; only——"

"You did not believe that I was really a Spada, did you?"

"No."

"You thought the name was assumed; eh?"

"Yes. Mercodatti thought so, and so did I."

"You now perceive that you were wrong?"

"Yes."

"And you believe that I am a genuine Spada?"

"Assuredly I do."

"It is well. I am a Spada; I am rich; I work with the Black Hand because I like the work—for the present, at least. Later, I may get tired of it, and——"

"And, if you do, and you attempt to drop the work, you know that you will be killed."

"I was just about to add that. But I shall not worry about that part of it until I feel like dropping it—and that certainly is not now."

"It will be—never—I hope."

"Good. Ah, pshaw!"

"What is the matter now?"

"I forgot to get cigars. There is a little store directly under here. Will you run down, and get a few? There will be no danger. Here is money. Yes? Hurry back. Here is the key to let yourself in when you return."

Pelluria obeyed; but he had no sooner left the room than Nick hurried into the alcove, rolled back one side of the rug that covered the floor, raised a trap-door that was concealed beneath it, took a telephone instrument from the receptacle under it, took the receiver from the hook, and placed it against his ear—and instantly, from the other end of the wire, heard the words, plainly spoken:

"On deck, sir."

CHAPTER IV.

NICK CARTER ON A SHADOW TRAIL.

The rooms to which Nick Carter had taken Pelluria were some that he had engaged long before to use as his headquarters while he should be interested in his case against the Black Hand, and which he had, of course, taken under the name of Marco Spada.

The telephone he was now making use of was a private wire which communicated directly with a private room at police headquarters, and where the commissioner of police kept a confidential clerk, night and day, awaiting any possible message from the detective.

Nick Carter knew that he had only a very few minutes in which to converse with the clerk at the opposite end of the wire, for Pelluria might return at any moment; however, he hurried to the outer door, and left it ajar a trifle so that he could hear Pelluria's footsteps as soon as he entered the lower hall; and then he returned to the telephone.

"I have a message for you to deliver to the commissioner," he said then, over the phone.

"The commissioner is right here with me now," came the reply.

"Good!" said Nick. "In that case, I will talk to him."

Then, a moment later, he heard:

"Hello, Nick!"

"How are you, commissioner?"

"Fine; and you?"

"Never better."

"What is the news, Nick?"

"Everything worked exactly as we planned it."

"Splendid! Tell me about it."

"There isn't a great deal to tell; and I haven't very much time, either."

"Well, go ahead with what you can."

"Pelluria planned the escape himself, with scarcely a suggestion from me."

"Good!"

"I did the fighting, at the entrance to Ludlow Street Jail. I did not let Pelluria strike a blow. He thinks that I knocked all three of the men."

"Fine."

"Then we ran for it."

"Of course."

"And I brought him here."

"Was that wise?"

"I think so, else I would not have done it."

"Sure."

"We have struck a gold-mine in Pelluria, commissioner."

"How so?"

"He is a member of the 'Hundred and One.'"

"What the devil is the 'Hundred and One'?"

"It is the root, trunk, torso, and all the branches of the Black Hand."

"You don't say so?"

"Indeed, I do."

"I suppose you will become a member of it, then; eh?"

"To-morrow night, I think."

"And after that your job will be—comparatively—an easy one; eh?"

"Yes—comparatively. You used that word advisedly."

"You will keep me posted?"

"Sure. After to-night, I will have more chance to talk with you. Try and be at this phone at the same time to-morrow night—or, no; the night after to-morrow."

"All right."

"I must stop now. Good night."

The detective replaced the instrument in its hiding-place, closed the trap, and put the rug back into place; and he was seated in an easy chair near the window when Pelluria returned with the cigars.

"It is later than I thought it was," said the detective, looking at his watch, while he accepted one of the cigars and lighted it. "Now, Pelluria, what would you like best to do at the present moment, if you could do exactly as you pleased?"

"What time is it?" was the reply.

"Half-past ten."

"Then, if I dared to do so, or could do it without any danger of being seen and recognized, I would like to go to the headquarters of the 'Hundred and One.'"

"What for?"

"I want to make ready for your reception to-morrow night."

"There is no reason why you should not go."

"Can you fix me up so that I would not be recognized?"

"Easily. Just as easy as living on a farm."

"Have you got things here to do it with?"

"I have enough material here, Pelluria, to make a dozen different disguises for each of us, and still have some to spare."

"That is fine. Will you fix me up, then, and let me go?"

"Surely. Right away."

"And will you sit up for me, and await my return? For I want to come back here."

"Yes; or you may keep that key you have in your pocket, and return when you get ready. You can sleep on that couch, near the window. If you turn back the cover, you will find that a bed has been made up under it."

"That's all right."

"What time will you return?"

"I should be back here by two o'clock."

"All right. Now, how do you wish to be made up?"

"I will leave that to you."

"Do you prefer to be an old man, or a young one? An Italian, or an American? A Chinaman, or a negro? Just state your preference."

"I haven't any. I will leave that to you."

"How would a hobo strike you?"

"I should think that would be the very thing—for to-night."

"All right."

There was a huge chiffonier with wide, deep drawers in the room, and Nick opened one of these, taking therefrom some clothing.

"Get inside those clothes," he said. "I will finish the rest of you after you have done that."

Pelluria was soon arrayed in the rags that Nick had provided, and then, with the addition of an unkempt wig and ragged beard, and with his face painted to represent a perfect specimen of the genus hobo, Pelluria was prepared to sally forth into the street.

"You will do finely," said the detective. "The devil himself wouldn't know you, and I fancy he is better acquainted with you than anybody else."

"I shouldn't wonder if that is true."

"Well, you can go now; and you need not have the least fear."

"All right. What do you intend to do?"

"I? I shall crawl into that bed right away. My cot at the jail was not stuffed with down. Was yours?"

"With bricks, I think."

"You will return by two, or three?"

"Yes; by three anyhow."

"So long, then. Now, don't forget that you are a hobo. You must act the part as well as look it. Shuffle aimlessly along. Stop, and stare in a window now and then.

...into a gin-mill or two, and buy yourself a beer; but don't show more than a nickel in money at any one place. Work your way gradually to the place you are aiming at."

"Oh, I can do the turn all right."

"Good."

And so Pelluria went out of the room, and down the stairs.

But he had scarcely reached the foot of the lower flight before the detective was after him, having altered his own appearance so quickly that he occupied only a moment after Pelluria left the room.

He had prepared for his own change while he was getting the things ready for Pelluria, and now it was an easy matter for him to twist up the ends of his mustache, to add a fierce-looking and thoroughly French imperial to his chin, to change his coat for a tightly buttoned frock, to adjust a pair of eye-glasses to his nose, and to don a square-crowned stiff hat.

Then, with the addition of a light cane, he was also ready for the street, and he knew that he could talk with Pelluria himself, with no danger that the latter would recognize him.

When Pelluria left the street door, and started away, Nick was peering after him through a narrow slit between it and the casing, for he was not sure that Pelluria would not stop at some place near at hand to look back, and wait to see if the supposed Spada would follow after him.

And, as it happened, he did that very thing.

The detective looked on smiling—and waited behind the door until Pelluria decided to move on; and this he did after a wait of about ten minutes.

"Good!" thought the detective. "He did not entirely trust me; but he will do so after this, I think."

Then he watched his opportunity, and slipped out through the doorway.

He crossed the street hastily, and succeeded in getting to the other side before Pelluria turned to look back again; and then he sauntered along carelessly, keeping the latter in sight, but managing to keep himself screened from view.

"I suppose I am wasting my time," Nick was thinking to himself, "and that I might just as well have gone to bed, and waited for Pelluria to make the arrangements; but, all the same, I think he will bear watching for to-night; and, besides, I want to know where he goes, and what he does."

It was plainly evident before very long that Pelluria had no thought whatever that he was followed, for he maintained a direct course, and presently, having turned through Bleecker Street, he walked to the Bowery, and there took a down-town Third Avenue car.

The detective boarded the same car, but he entered at the front door, and seated himself in the corner, from which place he could watch Pelluria, who remained upon the platform of the car; and thus they rode to the post-office.

There, Pelluria got out of course, and he started directly down Broadway.

Everybody knows that this part of the great thoroughfare is deserted at that time of the night, and Nick realized that now it would be difficult to follow Pelluria without himself being discovered, and without arousing the suspicions of the Italian; so he crossed over to the Astor House, and sprang into a cab that stood there.

To the driver, the detective pointed out the shambling figure of the man he was following.

"I want you to walk your horse, and keep that man in sight," he said. "If you do it without attracting attention, you shall have double fare."

In this manner they arrived at South Ferry, and, having paid his driver, Nick followed his man upon the boat.

After that there was little or no difficulty in following Pelluria.

He crossed the river to the Brooklyn side, and then took another car until he arrived in that part of Brooklyn which is locally known as Gowanus; and there, rather to the surprise of the detective, he went to the water's edge, and helped himself to one of several skiffs that were moored to a float behind a storehouse.

"Humph!" thought the detective. "It is not going to be as easy as I thought to follow him. This is a new proposition; but needs must when the devil drives—and I think I can keep him in sight even at this."

Nick selected another boat, and sprang into it.

Then he dropped the oars between the thole-pins, and prepared to follow Pelluria to his destination.

CHAPTER V.

NICK CARTER'S MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE.

The place which Pelluria had selected, and where he found the boats, was situated at a remote part of the basin, although it was not really very far from the mouth of what is called the Gowanus Canal.

But it was a sort of bay, which put in toward the shore, where there were no facilities for general uses, and the consequence was that there were several acres of water there, where the bottom had gradually filled with refuse until the water was quite shallow.

And, as if the boatmen who frequented that spot from year to year were cognizant of all this—almost, in fact, as if the boats themselves had consciousness of it all, many craft which had passed their days of usefulness had been turned in there to rot.

Nick, peering through the shadows at the man he was following, saw him approach a place where three old canal-boats had been abandoned to their several fates—that is, to barnacles and rot.

They were lying in the mud, side by side, and outwardly they presented the appearance of utter desertion.

Nevertheless, Pelluria seemed to have business there, for he rowed straight to them, and then suddenly disappeared around on the opposite side—and that while Nick was still sitting in the boat he had selected, awaiting an opportunity to follow in safety.

When Pelluria disappeared, he waited still, a considerable time, and at last, deciding that the Italian had found some place of retreat in or near the boats, he rowed out upon the water, and cautiously approached the spot.

It was well that he did so silently and cautiously; it was well also that the night was quite dark, for, as he permitted his own boat to drift with the tide until it would have come into contact with the derelict canal-boats had he not put out a hand to prevent it, and held his craft there, he was suddenly conscious of the murmur of voices which proceeded from a place that was quite near to him.

He listened intently, but, try as he might, he could not, for a long time, locate the sound; nor could he distinguish a word that was uttered.

After a little, still clinging to the side of the boat, he began to work his way around; and, as he did so, he was conscious that he was getting nearer to the murmur of the voices.

Still, he could not hear the words, although, after a little, he could tell from whence the sound proceeded.

He knew that two men were talking together, in the interior of the old boat, and that he was as near to them as he could get at the present moment.

How he did wish that he could hear what was said; but that was impossible.

Then, suddenly, the voices ceased altogether, and utter silence reigned.

He waited many minutes for a repetition of the sound of talking, but, as it did not come, he at last decided to investigate.

With his hands against the side of the old boat, he moved his craft further and further about, peering into the gloom ahead of him constantly, in the endeavor to get a sight of the skiff which Pelluria had employed in getting out to the wrecks.

It was, however, nowhere to be seen, and he was on the point of giving it up, when his hand—the one with which he was feeling along the side of the wreck—came into contact with a portion of the wreck which did not seem like the rest of it.

He stopped a moment to examine what he had touched, and presently he found that a low, wide door—or, to be correct, a port—had been fitted nicely into the side of the wreck, and that, by reaching over the top of the bulwarks, he could touch the catch that was affixed to it on the inner side.

He did this, and discovered that after he had opened the catch the port opened into the old wreck quite easily; and, having pushed it open, and perceiving that it was darker than midnight inside the wreck, he reached into his pocket for his electric flash-light, and, having thrust it through the opening, touched the button.

It was with difficulty that he repressed an exclamation of astonishment when he did that.

The flash of his light revealed the whole interior of that place, and he saw instantly that it was a shallow basin of water, inside the bulwarks of the old craft, and upon a water-tight decking, so that there was, perhaps, a hundred square feet of water there, all of which was no more than eight or ten inches deep.

But that was not all.

The whole thing had been ingeniously arranged as a hiding-place for skiffs—and, with the aid of his flash-light, he counted seven that were already moored there.

It was a masterpiece of art, creating that place, for the detective realized at once that a skiff having passed through that port he had opened, or through another one—and there were doubtless others like it—it was entirely concealed from view from any point on the water or on the shore.

The occupant of a skiff had merely to duck his head down to a level with the gunwales of his boat, and then to pull himself through the port in the boat; then by closing the port again, he was effectually concealed from discovery.

"All the samee," muttered the detective to himself, "I do not want to take my boat inside that place, for I might not have time to get it out again when I want to go ashore—but the fact remains that I do want to go inside myself."

He studied the matter silently for a few moments, and then he calmly pushed his own boat back again to the place where he had first touched the wreck; and there he made it fast, and then climbed upon the deck of the old canal-boat.

Rather to his surprise, he discovered that he was on a sure footing, and being thoroughly convinced that the men inside the wreck—for he knew there were at least two men there, because he had heard their voices—would have so thoroughly guarded against the possibility of a glimmer of light shining through to the outside that it would be equally impossible for one to shine through from the outside, he again had recourse to his electric light.

That there must be a method of reaching the interior from where he stood, he was certain; and it was for him to discover it.

But for once, Nick Carter found himself at fault.

Try as he might, he could not discover the sign of a place by which he could gain the interior of the old craft, and he was on the point of giving up for the present, as a case of waiting until another time, when his prowess might come to his assistance.

He had turned back to the point where he had moored his own boat, and was in the act of stepping into it to go ashore and wait there for the return of Pelluria, when suddenly, quite near to him, he heard voices again.

In an instant he dropped down behind the deck-house of the cabin of the old craft, which seemed to be still intact, and stretched himself at full length along the deck; and then, after a moment, to his utter amazement, the entire covering of the old cabin—and it was a mass of timber and decking at least ten feet square—rose silently upward.

Had he not happened to be looking upward at the moment, he would not have known that the deck of the cabin moved at all, for there was not the slightest sound to warn him of it; but he *saw* it.

He remained perfectly silent and motionless; and then, presently, he could detect the soft tread of a man who was about to be ascending a ladder inside the place.

Listening, he heard the man step out upon the deck — or rather lower himself to it, for where he came out he must have been three feet above the main deck of the old boat.

Then following the first, came a second, and in a moment more they stood within four feet of the detective, and there they paused to engage in conversation.

They spoke in Italian, but it was the same as English to the detective, and he listened carefully to everything they said.

It was not much that he heard, but it gave him the cue he wanted.

"Pelluria says that the man is right," one of them was saying, almost in a whisper, "and he has no doubt that this Spada will be willing to pay a large initiation fee."

"And he also vouches for him with his life," said the other.

"Yes, but there was scarcely need to do that, was there?"

"There is always need of it."

"Still, we know what this Spada has already done."

"On the contrary, we know very little about him, save that he made the banker who is called Canova give up his money, and he was about to torture that other one—but what was his name?"

"Lagarelli."

"Yes, he was about to torture that one into doing the same."

"All that seems to be a good recommendation."

"Still, Cagliostro"—Nick started, for the name mentioned was that which the chief of the "Hundred" had assumed in place of his own, which was Bellini—"it will well to make him pay a handsome fee to become one of the 'Hundred.'"

"Surely."

"How much, shall we say? A thousand?"

"Yes."

"Very well. Then that is agreed."

"I am sorry that you have to go now, Cagliostro."

"It is as well. You are in command during my absence—and you are younger than I."

"But you will be here to-morrow night, of course?"

"Certainly; at midnight."

"You wish the man, Spada, to be brought here at that time?"

"Yes; at twelve to-morrow night."

"But not by water?"

"Certainly not. By the entrance through the warehouse."

"And you wish me to assist Pelluria in bringing him to the retreat; eh?"

"Yes."

"Good night, then."

"Good night. But stay, help me with the boat."

Then the two men glided away along the deck, and Nick could see the shadowy outlines of their figures as they passed along to the inner basin that has been described, where the several boats were kept.

The detective did not stay to watch all their proceedings, however.

He instantly saw, in their momentary absence, an opportunity to discover more than he had yet learned, and accordingly as soon as their backs were turned, he crept around the deck-house to the point where they had been standing, and then raising himself slowly, he peered over into the interior, again daring, for one instant, to make use of his light.

What he saw inside, was this:

A ladder leading downward into a well-like place, at the bottom of which was a large iron wheel with a handle attached to it.

This, the detective correctly guessed, was the machinery by which the section of deck was raised and lowered; and instantly, without thinking twice about it, he climbed through the narrow opening between the bulkhead and the section of raised deck and quickly descended the ladder.

For an instant, after he reached the bottom, he was startled to think that perhaps he had deliberately placed himself in a trap—and he knew that if he should be caught there, he would never be permitted to leave the place alive.

But a glance around him, with the aid of his light, showed him a way out of the difficulty.

Beside him, almost directly at the foot of the ladder, was a door through the bulkhead.

Fortunately, the men who had come out of it had left it ajar, otherwise it is doubtful if the detective would have discovered it, so cleverly had it been constructed, and so perfectly did it fit.

But now it was open, and instantly upon its discovery, the detective passed through and beyond it.

He dared to flash his light just once more, then; and as he did so, the shaft of illumination gleamed straight into the eyes of a third man who was approaching him rapidly along a narrow corridor which led away into the darkness; and Nick Carter knew that he was discovered, and that he must act at once—if ever.

CHAPTER VI.

A SLEEPING BEAUTY IN CHAINS.

It worked to Nick Carter's advantage that the man who approached him along that narrow passageway was so taken by surprise that for a moment he did nothing at all.

Then, when he would have opened his lips to sound the alarm, the fingers of Nick Carter's right hand closed with a giant grip around his throat and effectually shut off all sound.

And at the same instant, Nick struck him a terrific blow with the fist of his left hand, and between the blow on his temple and the awful choking he was undergoing, the man sank back limp and senseless in the detective's grasp.

But where, Nick wondered, in that narrow place, could he conceal himself or the man he had captured, so that the fellow who had gone to assist Cagliostro in launching his boat, would not discover them on his return?

There was nothing for it but to dare to make use of his flash-light again.

The detective understood that it was an exceedingly dangerous thing to do, but there was no help for it; and so he touched the button and threw the light around the place.

[illegible] instantly, that the man upon whom his light fell [illegible] and who now hung limply in his hands, had at the very instant he was discovered, entered the passage through a narrow door at one side of it, and that he had not had time even to close it after him.

It swung ajar almost directly in front of the detective, and so pushing his burden before him, Nick passed through and closed it after him.

But he did not know that the man, who by this time must be returning from the deck, would not take this same course, and so he again flashed his light around him.

He saw that he was in a little cubby-hole of a place, not more than five feet square, and that other doors opened off from it on each of the four sides.

Which door should he take?

He felt himself somewhat in the same predicament that exists in the story of "The Lady or The Tiger."

For might upon upon a meeting of the "Hundred and One" and so [illegible] himself a captive; or he might open upon a select conclave of a few of the Hundred, and by the noise of the attack and struggle that would surely follow, attract all the others to him—in which case he would be just as badly off; or he might step into a lighted room where he would betray himself at once, or——

He stopped conjecturing, and resolved to try one of the doors at once, for it was manifestly impossible that he should remain where he was.

Turning to the right, he opened that door, saw at a glance that there was black darkness beyond it, and then stepped through with his burden still in his arms, and closed the door behind him.

And he was just in time, too.

As he closed the door and stood for a moment listening, he heard the returning steps of the fellow who had conversed with Cagliostro on the deck; and he braced himself to be in readiness for anything that might happen, for he had no means of knowing that he would not enter by the selfsame door that he had just passed.

But after a moment he was reassured.

The man turned to the left, and as Nick pulled the door in front of him slightly ajar, he could see that the other passed into a place where lights were gleaming, and where there were a number of men seated together.

"By Jove!" he thought. "It was fortunate for me that I did not turn to the left. Had I opened that other door, I would have been in a pickle, sure."

He hesitated a moment, and then murmured to himself:

"And now what am I to do with this fellow? He will be coming to his senses, presently; or some one of those fellows in the other room will miss him and go in search of him. It is certainly plain that I have got to [illegible] light, and keep it lighted, too, until I know where I am at."

He pressed the button of the light and fastened it down, so that the light would be a steady one.

He discovered, then, that he was in a narrow place which was evidently a sort of an entry; and that in front of him, only a few feet distant, was a flight of stairs leading downward.

Realizing that he must go somewhere to rid himself of his burden, he did not hesitate, but at once descended the steps.

Presently he knew, by the dampness that surrounded him, that he was beneath the bottom of the old [illegible].

The joinery work of wood that had surrounded him hitherto had now given place to cement, and [illegible] great drops of moisture clung, and glistened like [illegible] diamonds in the light he threw upon them.

And the steps led a long way down.

He figured that he had descended fully three [illegible] sibly forty feet, before he arrived at the bottom, and there he was confronted by a heavy oak door.

It was not locked, however, and he pushed it open and passed beyond it.

Here he came upon a cemented corridor, which ascended—toward the shore, he thought—at a slight angle.

The place was just sufficiently high enough for him to stand upright easily, and was about the width of its length.

"This is another entrance to their retreat," he thought, "and unless I am greatly mistaken it will lead me to those storehouses, where——"

He stopped suddenly, while he chuckled to himself.

"Sure!" he murmured. "Cagliostro's Stores. Why in the world did I never think of it before. Cagliostro's Warehouses; and Cagliostro is the name—the assumed name—of the chief of the 'Hundred and One.'

"It is as plain as the nose on my face.

"All this part of the basin, here, is under rental to Cagliostro, who owns the stores. He receives twenty-five thousand dollars a year as salary from the Black Hand. With that amount he has made himself a rich man. He has bought the stores. He has left this part of the basin to abandonment. He has built this wonderful place out of the hulks of old canal-boats. He has employed only members of the Black Hand to do the work, for many of them work constantly in the subways, and in the tunnels of the East and North Rivers, as well as down deep in the caissons of the sky-scrapers of New York.

"They would know how to do this job, to do it secretly and to do it well; and thus, the man, Cagliostro, who is supposed to be a rich Italian warehouse owner of Brooklyn, and who is really the chief of the whole association of the Black Hand, has secured a retreat for his followers which defies detection.

"But what I cannot understand, is why, if this is another entrance, and if as I suspect it leads out through the warehouses, he did not take this way out when he went away instead of going by boat."

The detective had come to a halt while he was turning these thoughts over in his mind; but now he started on again, still bearing the unconscious man in his arms.

The way was long and tedious, particularly with that dead weight to carry; but at last he came to another heavy door—unlocked like the first one—and having passed beyond it, found himself in what he supposed to be the cellar of the warehouses.

Almost directly beside him, snugly ensconced in one corner of the cellar, was a room built of deal boards, and inside this hutlike room, a bed, and other necessaries, to render it a habitation.

Instantly the detective guessed who the man was that he was carrying.

"He is the sentinel at this entrance," he thought. "For some reason, best known to themselves, the 'Hundred and One' placed me this means of entering and leaving their retreat, and so it is likely that not one of them knew that he was present in the retreat itself, at the time I attacked him.

"And there is only one thing for me to do now.

"I must bind and gag him so that he cannot escape or make a sound, and then I must find the way out of here; also I wish to return to that retreat, and learn a trifle more about it if possible.

"Well, I think that both are possible; and I will do both."

He threw his burden upon the bed in the small room, and presently, having discovered a coil of small rope ready at hand, he had the man so thoroughly tied up that there was no possibility of his escaping.

Then, with a short stick and his own handkerchief, he made a gag, which having inserted in the man's jaws, he fastened there.

"There," he said, half aloud, "I think you are safe for the present. I will come back here when I have completed the work in hand, and then I will have decided what to do with you; for it is certain that it will never do to leave you here; nor will it do to let any other members of the 'Hundred and One' see or talk with you until after *all* my work is done."

Having tied the man to the bed so that he could not roll off on the floor, the detective left him and hurried back through the tunnel toward the "Retreat."

He was not hampered now, by the dead weight of the body he had been carrying; and moreover, he was much better informed concerning his surroundings than when he first entered the strange place.

It is true that he now knew that he was to be taken to that same place the next night, that then and there he would be made a member of the "Hundred and One," and therefore it may seem unnecessary that he should risk his life in what appears to be an utterly reasonless investigation of the place now.

Still, the spirit of adventure was upon him. He was there, and the desire to know all that could be learned before he was brought there again and the mysteries of the place should be revealed to him in the regular way, was much too strong to resist.

And so he passed back through the tunnel toward the old boats, wherein and whereunder was located the retreat.

It had occurred to him while he was in the cellar of the warehouse, that it would not be a difficult matter for him to make himself up in imitation of the man he had captured and bound and so to venture among the Hundred; but he dismissed the idea almost as soon as it came to him.

He was not long in returning to the little square room where he had passed with his burden in his arms, nor knowing which of the four doors to take; and here again he came to a stop.

He knew something about what was beyond one of those doors, for he had seen the man who accompanied Cagliostro to the deck pass through it; and at the same time he had seen the forms of several men seated in there, and he had known that there were others there whom he could not see.

The door through which he had traveled himself, he also knew; but there were two others.

"I will try the one to the right," he thought; and suiting the action to the word he placed his hand upon it and opened it very gently, moving it barely the fraction of an inch at a time in order that he might not disturb any person who might happen to be on the other side of it.

But there was nobody there.

Instead, he saw instantly that the door opened into a sort of stateroom.

There was a light burning in there, too, and at the risk of discovery—for the owner of that room was likely to appear at any moment—he passed inside.

A hasty glance around, however, told him that there was nothing to discover there—at least there was not with so short a time as he felt he could vouchsafe it just then, so he stepped outside again and turned his attention to the only remaining door of the four that he had not examined.

He opened it as gently as he had done in the other case—opened it and peered inside.

Then he nearly cried out aloud with the surprise he felt at what he saw.

The opening of the door admitted him to a large room—that is, large for such a place—and it was sumptuously appointed, too.

But that was not what astonished him, almost into betraying his presence there.

There was a couch at the far side of the room, and lying upon it apparently asleep, but nevertheless chained and padlocked to the bulkhead, was a woman.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RESCUE AND THE ESCAPE.

Nick Carter quickly decided what he would do.

Upon the instant that his eyes rested upon the form of that sleeping woman, his mind was made up.

There would be no further effort on his part to investigate the retreat of the "Hundred and One" of the Black Hand, or to learn more about the men who happened to be there at the time.

He would abandon all that for the night, and devote all his energies to saving the prisoner chained to the couch.

He had noticed the method of fastening her, at a glance.

A steel chain, not too large, but strong enough to hold a much more muscular person than she could be, had been passed around her waist and the links locked together with a padlock.

The other end of the chain was fastened to the bulkhead by a large staple that was driven firmly into the solid framework of the old boat.

She was fully dressed and her position was such that Nick could not see her face when he first peered into the room, although, as in the case of the room opposite this one, a light was burning upon a small table in the middle of the apartment.

But as he hastily stepped inside, he saw her plainly, and then he nearly exclaimed aloud again, for he recognized her instantly.

The woman was Lucia Bellini, the daughter of the Bellini.

It was she who had befriended him when he first met her, and it was she whom he had rescued from abduction at the hands of Mercodatti.

Nick Carter's little pocket case of tools was in his grasp and opened instantly; and after two seconds spent in adjusting the proper tool, the sharp nippers bit through the steel links of the chain as a knife would cut butter.

He shook her, then, rather roughly, to rouse her from her sleep; but although she stirred uneasily, she did not open her eyes.

"Drugged," muttered the detective. "She has been drugged since she was brought here, else she could not have removed her hat and placed it so carefully on the floor beside her. If another than herself had taken it off, it would have been placed on the table. Doubtless she was given a sleeping potion in a cup of tea, or coffee."

He was acting while these thoughts passed through his mind.

As soon as he had cut the chain, he bent over and took the unconscious form of the woman in his arms.

Then he raised her gently and turned toward the door.

He noticed that there was a key on the inside of the lock, and with sudden resolution, he secured it.

Then he turned back into the room long enough to extinguish the light that burned on the table, and having done that, he passed outside again, closing and locking the door after him.

"They will suppose—for a time at least—that she has somehow managed to fasten the door on the inside," he thought; and then with the still unconscious form in his arms, he passed through the door which led to the tunnel, and closed it after him.

The stairs were before him, and he hastened down them as rapidly as he could walk, for he knew that it might not be a long time before the escape of the prisoner would be discovered.

However, as he hurried along, there came no sound to warn him that such a discovery had been made, and thus he reached the cellar under the warehouse.

But now he did not stop at the small room where he had left the man he had captured.

Instead, he searched around the place until he found the stairs which led to the floor above, and having mounted them, and raised a large trap-door, he presently stepped out upon the main floor of the warehouse.

Immediately before him was a pile of bagging, and he deposited Lucia there. Then, after examining her carefully to make sure that she would not recover consciousness before he could return, he wheeled about and descended to the celler again.

He had found a way to solve the problem that confronted him, and nobody less than Nick Carter himself would ever have thought of it; or having thought of it, would have dared to undertake it.

The detective hurried back to the little room, and discovered that his prisoner had not yet recovered from the trance in which that awful blow and the severe choking had placed him.

But the man was breathing rapidly, and he gave every evidence of being about to open his eyes, so the detective acted hastily.

From one of his pockets he produced a phial of chloroform, and having spilled the contents upon a second handkerchief he carried, he applied it to the nostrils and mouth of the unconscious Italian.

While he held the chloroform there, he slowly loosened the gag, and presently, after the man had passed entirely under the effect of the drug, he threw the gag aside altogether.

Next, he unfastened the ropes that bound him, and having recoiled this and returned it to the place where he had first discovered it, and also disposing of the now useless gag, so that it would not be found, he picked the man up in his arms again and started with him toward the tunnel.

"If there is only time," he thought. "If only I am not caught in the act, it will work splendidly."

He walked with rapid steps now.

He passed into the tunnel and hurried along it as if he were racing; only when he came to the stairs, he paused for a moment to listen.

"It seems to be all clear," he mused; and then he started up the stairs.

At the entrance to the little room of the four doors, he paused again; but only for a moment.

Then he passed boldly through it.

The key to the door of the room from which he had taken Lucia was in his grasp, and he quickly made use of it.

Then, passing inside, he threw the senseless man upon the pallet where Lucia had been chained to the wall; and then he passed the chain twice around his neck, and with the pliers made the two little ends together, so that the fellow was much more abjectly a prisoner than Lucia had been.

That done, the detective sprang outside the room, locked the door behind him, dropped the key in his pocket and sped away through the other door and down the stairs toward the tunnel, just as he heard the opposite door open, and the sound of men's voices as they came out from it.

He did not stop then.

He hastened along at full speed, feeling no longer any curiosity as to what the men there would do.

There was no doubt in his own mind that one of them would discover that the door to the room in which Lucia had been placed, was locked; but whether they would at once seek admittance there or not, he had no idea; he only hoped that they would not.

His plan—lest the reader might not fully comprehend it—was this:

When the discovery of the escape of Lucia was made, the men would naturally hold the man they would find there in her place, as responsible for it.

What else could they think? How else could he have gotten there at all, unless he had gone of his own accord? And the mere fact that the young woman had somehow overcome the man and chained him in her place after he had liberated her, intending to set her free, would appear to them as merely an incident in the affair, and as serving the intruder right.

As for the story he would tell about having encountered a stranger with a light, in one of the corridors at the very moment when the chief and one of the other members were on the deck, they would give no credence to such a story at all; and thus it appeared as if the detective had not only visited the retreat and rescued Lucia Bellini, but also that he would leave no trace whatever of his presence, behind him.

Nick Carter was not long in returning to the warehouse.

He merely glanced into the room in the cellar to see that everything was all right, and that he had left no trace that the man who occupied it had been bound and gagged upon his own bed, and then he hastened to the floor above where he had left Lucia.

She was there where he left her, and she was beginning to recover.

Nick believed there was no time to be lost.

He knew that when the escape of Lucia was discovered, the men of the "Hundred and One" would search everywhere for her, for not one of them would believe that she could ever make her way out of their retreat alone and unaided.

But the detective found that it is sometimes as difficult to get out of a building as it is to make your way in, and before he had found a place where he could

escape from the warehouse, Lucia had recovered possession of her senses.

He managed to be beside her when she did recover, and upon hearing her first gasp of dismay, he quickly reassured her.

"Be quiet," he said swiftly. "Make not a sound as you value your life, for we are both in great danger."

"Who are you?" she asked, for it was utter darkness where they were now.

"I am Spada," he replied. "Your friend, Marco Spada."

"Yes," she whispered. "I recognize your voice now. And have you rescued me again?"

"Yes; I was fortunate enough to be able to do so; although we are by no means out of the woods as yet."

"They took me somewhere in a boat," she whispered.

"Yes. Don't try to ask about things just now, but lie quietly where you are."

"For what? Why?"

"We are in an old warehouse. We must get out of it somehow before your captors discover your escape and come here in search of you."

"In a warehouse? Is it the property of my cousin, Bellini? He who is called Cagliostro?"

"Yes."

"You are sure?"

"Positive."

"Then I know the way out. Give me your hand. In what part of the warehouse are we now?"

"On the first floor. The cellar is directly beneath us."

"Do you know where the office of the building is located?" she asked.

"Yes; I discovered it a moment ago."

"Give me your hand and guide me to it. From there I can show you a secret way out."

"How does it happen that you know of such a place?"

"I was here once with my father. We remained very late in consultation with my cousin. He showed us out by the secret way. It opens from the office. Come."

The detective gave her his hand and led her directly to the office she had mentioned, and they passed inside and closed the door after them; and even as they did so, they could hear the sound of voices from the cellar, which told them that the escape had been discovered and that already the searchers were looking for their prisoner.

"Quick!" said Nick. "There is no time to lose."

He heard her laugh in a low tone to herself, and then she said:

"They cannot find us now, Mr. Spada. We are safe. There is not a member of the Black Hand save Cagliostro, my father and myself, who know of this hiding-place."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I know it is so."

"Then make haste just the same, for in a short time the searchers will come to this floor after us."

"Let them come. They will not find us. Ah! Here it is."

He felt that she grasped his hand and pulled him toward her; and then they seemed to pass through an opening in the wall. Next he heard something snap shut behind them, and he knew that for the moment, at least, they were out of danger.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STRANGE PROPOSAL.

"Have you a match?" she asked quietly, of the detective, after they had stood there in the darkness and in silence for a moment.

"Yes," replied Nick.

"Strike it, please. There is a gas-jet behind you."

"Is it safe to make a light here, Lucia? The men are quite near to us."

"They might as well be a thousand miles distant, for all the idea they will have of our proximity," she said. "This is a secret room. It is inside a shaft, which extends all the way to the roof of the building."

"I see."

"No light can get out of here."

"I hope that we can get out, if the light cannot," said the detective, smiling.

"Oh, yes, easily; when the proper time comes."

"Tell me, Lucia," whispered Nick, "how did you get into the predicament in which I found you?"

"I do not know. I don't even understand who my captors were. I did not know where they had taken me; all that I did know what that I was in the power of one of the groups of the Black Hand."

"Were you blindfolded?"

"Yes—for a time. At first they permitted me to see, but they themselves kept their faces covered. We entered a hack and we traveled a long way. I think we came across the ferry to Brooklyn, but I was blindfolded before that. Later, they took me from the hack, and we entered a boat; and then——"

"I think I know the rest. But why did you not cry out?"

"Because I knew they would kill me if I did so."

"But were you not terribly afraid?"

"No; I knew that if I was in the power of any group of the Black Hand, they would not dare to do me any bodily harm or injury."

"Why not?"

"Being a Bellini, my person is sacred to them—at least, the man who harms me would meet a horrible death at the hands of the others."

"Mercodatti braved even that fear."

"Ah! he was crazed."

"You mean that he was in love."

"No, Spada, I do not call that love."

"But what did these men who captured you and took you to the place where I found you intend to do with you?"

"That I cannot tell; but they could do nothing—they would dare do nothing more than to keep me a close prisoner until, for the sake of gaining my liberty, I would consent to become the wife of one of them."

"So, that is the game, is it?"

"Yes; but pray do not suppose that it is I whom they are after."

"If not you, then——"

"It is the power that I would confer upon the man I married."

"I do not understand."

"I am a Bellini."

"Yes; I know that."

"My father is, by birth, at the head of the order."

"I know that also."

"He has no son; he has only a daughter—myself."

"Yes."

"Having no son, but still having a daughter, it is the rule of the order, that whomsoever I shall wed, takes the name of Bellini, and so inherits what an own son might have done. Do you understand now?"

"Yes."

"The man who becomes my husband will ultimately be the chief of all the Black Hand."

Nick smiled across the room at her.

"And so," he said, "when you add to all those advantages you have named, the fact that you are also young and beautiful, it is no wonder that you are made the victim of persecutions."

She shrugged her shoulders, and, after a moment of silence, she said:

"I wish you would tell me now how it happened that you were there to save me."

"I hardly know myself."

"You should know how you came to be there."

"Well, I do, of course; but it is rather a strange story."

"Nevertheless, tell it to me."

"First, let me ask you if you have any idea at all into whose hands you had fallen?"

"No; that is, I do not know directly; but since you have told me that we are in the warehouse of my cousin—since, in fact, I know that much, because of this secret room—I have no doubt but that the place where I was held a prisoner, with a chain around my waist, only a short time ago, is the retreat of the Hundred and One."

"You are right. It is."

"But tell me how you happened to be there. You are not a member of the Hundred, are you?"

"No—at least, not yet."

"Do you mean that you intend to become one?"

"Yes; to-tomorrow night."

"Are you wise?"

"I think so."

"Have you forgotten the pledge that we made to each other at the time you rescued me from the power of Mercodatti?"

"No."

"We agreed with each other that we would destroy the Black Hand as it at present exists."

"I know we did."

"Is that why you are going into 'Bellini's Home'? Is that why you are to become a member of the Hundred and One?"

"Yes."

"To betray them?"

"Ultimately—yes."

"It is a great risk."

"I must take the risk."

"I know a method by which it could be accomplished much more easily and with scarcely any risk at all."

"Perhaps you will tell me what that is."

"I will, presently; but, first of all, tell me how you came to be there to-night; or tell me, rather, how you came to be here at all. I supposed that you were in prison, and this very day I have set in motion a plan for getting your freedom."

"You did?"

"Yes."

"How did you propose to accomplish that?"

"By bribery. It could have been done. You rescued me once. I owe you a debt of gratitude. I would be a sorry spectacle of a woman if I permitted you to stay in prison when there was a possibility of effecting your rescue."

"It was kind of you even to think of it."

"I have thought more about you than that, Spada."

"It is kind of you."

"Now tell me how you escaped, and how you happened to be here to rescue me a second time."

"Pelluria and I escaped together. We escaped from the van when they were transferring us to Ludlow Street Jail."

"And Pelluria escaped with you?"

"Yes."

"Where is he now?"

"I expect he is out there in the warehouse, looking for you."

"Was he one of the men who abducted me?"

"No; but he was one of the men who were in the retreat at the time I brought you away."

"Ah!"

"I followed him when he went there to-night. That is how I happened to be there."

"And do you mean to say that you got inside without assistance?"

"Yes; but fortune favored me, otherwise I could not have done it."

"And Cagliostro——"

"He was going away when I arrived; that is how——"

A sudden exclamation from Lucia made him pause.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I can see through it all now," she replied.

"Through all of what?"

"I know who was my abductor."

"Who, then?"

"No less a person than Cagliostro himself."

"Do you mean that he would seek to marry you?"

"Yes—for the power it would give him."

"But he is as old as your father."

"All the more reason why he wishes to attain the power—and to have me for his wife."

"You have no doubt about it that he was the one?"

"Not at all."

"Well, I was there, fortunately. I was investigating the place, although I knew that I would be taken there to-morrow night. I came upon you. You were chained to the wall, and were sleeping on a couch. I supposed that you had been drugged."

"I think I had been. They brought me a cup of tea. I remember that after drinking it I became very drowsy. After that I knew nothing more until I awakened and heard your voice."

"I had already captured one of the men," said Nick. "I think he was a watchman in the cellar of the warehouse. After I found you I took him to the place where I left you, and put him in the position in which I discovered you. I expect he is about the most mystified man in America, just about now."

Lucia made no reply; but presently she asked:

"Are you still determined to become a member of the Hundred and One, to-morrow night?"

"Yes."

"You prefer that method to accomplish what you wish to do rather than the one I will suggest, by which it all may be done without danger to either of us."

"You have not yet told me what that method is."

"It is very simple."

"Usually. Most good things are so."

"I am afraid that you will think me bold, and unwomanly, because of the suggestion."

Nick did not reply. He was afraid that he began to understand what she was going to suggest.

"Spada," she asked, after a little, "are you a married man?"

"I am a widower, Lucia."

"Your wife is dead?"

"Yes."

"Since how long?"

"Two years."

Lucia turned her back toward him, and then, after a moment of silence, she said very slowly:

"You already understand, Spada, the power that would fall upon the man who became my husband. He would at once be chief of all, and all-powerful in the Black Hand. Therefore, I say to you—if you ask me to do so, I will be your wife, and then together we will destroy the monster that the Black Hand has become. I will marry you, Spada, if you ask it."

CHAPTER IX.

NICK CARTER FACES AN UNNAMED DANGER.

It is doubtful if the reader can understand the delicacy of the situation in which Nick Carter found himself at that moment.

There, before him, in the secret chamber of that warehouse on the shore of the Erie Basin, with downcast eyes, flushed cheeks, heaving bosom, and pouting, timorous lips, stood one of the most beautiful specimens of God's creation—Lucia Bellini; and she had just told him that—if he asked her—she would become his wife.

The time was after midnight, too; and the detective had just rescued her from a fate which might have been worse than death.

By every law of compensation he had won the right to her unlimited gratitude; but she chose to give him something more—to confer her hand, her heart, her love upon him.

Lucia knew of herself that she was beautiful; she knew also that notwithstanding the surroundings in which she had lived, she had preserved her own soul, pure and good.

She knew that many men had loved her and had sought to win her; and she knew that it was not alone the power which would go with her to the man she married that attracted them.

She thoroughly understood her own attractions—and for the first time she was herself attracted.

There was a quality within this stranger whom she knew only as Marco Spada, which attracted her irresistibly. She could not define it; it is doubtful if she even sought to do so.

The hot, Latin blood that coursed through her veins never stopped to reason.

This man—Spada—who stood before her, had twice saved her life. He was handsome and he was good; and, with the impulsiveness of her race, she did not stop to ask more.

She believed that she knew this much: That he was not what he seemed to be. He had appeared among her people as Marco Spada, and she believed him to be an Italian, but further than that she did not [illegible]

was that at times she wondered if he were not an agent who had been sent out by the police or the government, to destroy the society of the Black Hand.

In the conjecture we know that she was right—but she only guessed it.

Return again, now, for a moment, to the delicacy of Nick Carter's position.

Plainly, there was only one course for him to pursue.

He could not make her his wife; such a thing would be against all the traditions of his life and training; he would not deceive her, even for a moment, and most certainly he was too honorable a gentleman to permit her for one moment to deceive herself.

He could see that she was in deadly earnest.

He knew enough of her race and of her impulses to realize that unless he acted with marvelous diplomatic skill, all that love which she now felt for him would in one instant be transposed into hate, and that in the throes of the rage that would follow it, she might impulsively destroy the fabric he had builded up for the destruction of the Black Hand.

It was his duty to placate her; to make her understand that marriage between them was utterly impossible, and at the same time he must spare her from even the suggestion of humiliation.

After that first interval of silence, which was in reality so short that it was unnoticed by Lucia, the detective stepped forward until he could reach out to her, and then he took both her hands in his.

The motion was almost as if he intended to take her at her word on the spot—to accept the suggestion she had made, and to act upon it; and for that brief instant she raised her great, shining eyes to his with an expression in them that he would have dodged if he had dared to do so.

But he did not give her an opportunity to speak again; indeed, he himself spoke so rapidly and so much to the point, that when he had finished there was nothing left for her to say.

"Lucia," he said to her, "you are a noble woman; so noble, indeed, that you would sacrifice your heart and all your future life to a sense of duty to your father, to your countrymen—and to me. But you must not do this thing. Wait! Do not interrupt me. Let me finish.

"You must not permit yourself to mistake your feeling of gratitude toward me for love; for it is not love that you feel, Lucia. You would give yourself to me—you would become my wife just because you see in that relation between us opportunities to do a great work, and to do it well.

"By conferring upon me the great honor of becoming the husband of a Bellini, you would place me at the head of the organization, and you believe that also you would eliminate all the dangers that surround me from my life.

"Believe me, Lucia, I am deeply conscious of the enormous sacrifice you would make; but I honor you and esteem you much too highly to permit you to do such a thing.

"No, my friend, we must not think of such a thing as marriage. We must continue to work on as we are—as very good friends who will remain friends for all time. We will have perfect confidence in each other. We will work together for the common good. We will struggle to so accomplish the thing that is nearest to our hearts—but we will do it as friends; and we will not deceive each other or ourselves.

"You see, Lucia, I know that you do not love me. If you loved me, you would never have announced yourself as you did just now. You would not, in that case, have had the courage to do so. But since you saw in the suggestion only a means to an end—only a great duty to be performed and only a sacrifice to make, you had the courage to speak.

"And since it is true that you do not love me—since we both understand that it was only gratitude and the command of your own idea of duty which compelled you to speak—I may tell you something which you will understand and appreciate.

"I have just told you that I have lost my wife. She died under very sad circumstances. It is too long a story to relate to you now, but I do want you to know that to this day her memory fills my heart just as full of love as her material presence did before she was taken away.

"Is it wrong for me to remain in love with my wife, even after she is dead, Lucia? You will be the first to assure me that it is not; you will be the first to honor me because of it.

"There is no woman who lives in the world to-day who could take her place in my heart, or who could ever hope to fill it; and if I were to take to myself a wife, under such circumstances, I would be committing as great a wrong as if I were actually in love with another woman who was living.

"I know that you do love me—as friends love each other. I know that you do believe in me, as friends believe in each other; and I know that some day there will come into your life a perfect love, which will crown it with happiness for all time. Do you understand me, my dear friend?"

"Yes," she murmured—and bowed her head. There were tears in her eyes, but Nick chose not to see them.

"And we will remain as we are to each other, Lucia; now, and for all time?"

"Yes," she repeated.

The detective breathed a great sigh of infinite relief. He had won out; and he had done so without permitting her to suspect that he understood her real motive in making the suggestion of marriage between them.

There was an interval of silence after that which the detective brought to a close by an entire change of the subject.

"Lucia," he said—and he made a palpable effort to speak gaily—"since you knew of this secret room where we have hidden so successfully, do you also know a way out of the building?"

"Yes."

"And where does it take us out?"

"Into an alleyway between the two warehouses."

"Then I think we may venture it at once," said the detective. "Do we have to return to the great room of the warehouse, or is there a way out from this room?"

For reply, she passed to the opposite side of the room, and, seizing upon a chiffonier that appeared to stand solidly against the wall, she pulled it toward her with apparently little effort, and, as it swung outward, it disclosed an opening behind it.

"This way," she said. "Put out the light and follow me."

He did so; but he immediately brought his electric light into use, and presently they had passed down a short flight of steps and were threading a narrow corridor which was barely wide enough for Nick to get through.

And this passageway took them almost the entire length of the building.

Very evidently it was constructed between partitions; and it ended abruptly at a small iron door that was set into the brickwork of the building.

She placed one hand on his arm to detain him while she explained.

"That small door," she said, "swings in—toward us. It is made like a box, and on the outside it is filled with bricks that come flush with the wall of the building, so that if you were standing there in daylight, searching for it, you would not be able to discover it."

"That is ingenious," said the detective.

"Yes; you will see that there is no lock on the door at all. It merely fits tightly into place, so that from this side you have only to pull on that handle to open it; and from the outside you would have only to push heavily against the bricks at the proper spot, to have the door swing inward and admit you to this passage."

"I understand," said Nick.

"So," she continued, "if you were hotly pursued, and could escape for one moment into the narrow alley upon which this door opens, you would only have to push against this door, leap inside, and close it after you, to escape utterly—and so mysteriously that your pursuers would cross themselves in superstitious terror at your escape."

"It might be worth while to remember just where that spot is located," said the detective.

"Yes; that is why I have explained it so fully."

"And, now, are you ready?" asked the detective.

"Yes."

"It is one o'clock in the morning," he said, glancing at his watch with the aid of his light. "I would not have supposed that so much could happen in so short a time."

"What time did you get here?" she asked.

"About midnight, or a little before. Everything has happened in little more than an hour."

The detective put out his light and returned it to his pocket.

Then he pulled upon the small iron door, very carefully at first, so that he opened it only a little at a time.

But presently he thrust his head through the opening and looked up and down the alley.

There was nobody in sight; and there was not a sound to indicate that anybody was near them.

"I think the coast is clear," he said. "I only wish that I knew exactly where those men are now, who are searching for you."

"Probably they have returned to the retreat," she suggested; but Nick shook his head in doubt.

"I hardly think so," he said. "I do not think they would give up the search for you so easily. They could not know that you could find your way out of the building."

"Not unless they sent after my father's cousin, Gallostro," she murmured.

"Come!" said Nick. "I had not thought of that. He may come after us at any moment, for he will realize that you know about this secret way. Come!"

They stepped into the alley and closed the door after them; and then, taking her by the hand, the detective led the way along the alley to the street.

Like the alleyway, that was deserted; nor did they encounter anything to interfere with their flight.

ter a long walk, they found a car which took them across the bridge, where the detective lost no time in securing a carriage for Lucia.

"Where will you go?" he asked her. "I can provide a place of safety for you, if——"

"My place is at home," she interrupted. "My place is with my father, and I wish to return alone. Send me there. I will be on my guard hereafter; and I hope that you will come there to see me."

"I shall surely do so," replied the detective, as he helped her into the carriage and bade her good night. And then he hastened toward his rooms in the Italian quarter, hoping that he would arrive there before the return of Pelluria.

CHAPTER X.

NICK'S MASTERPIECE OF DECEPTION.

Pelluria had not returned when Nick Carter arrived at his rooms.

The detective knew that because of the fact that when he left the place he had drawn a slender silk thread tightly across the doorway, so that Pelluria could not have entered the room without breaking it.

He lost no time when he was inside in divesting himself of his disguise. It will be remembered that he had worn one all the evening; and if no mention of it has been made, especially of the surprise of Lucia when she discovered it, it is because it was unnecessary to do so, and would only have taken up time and space.

That done, he tumbled into bed and composed himself as though he was apparently asleep when Pelluria did make his appearance.

How narrow a margin the detective had can be understood when it is said that a quarter of an hour had not elapsed after he was in bed before he heard a key turn in the lock, and the Italian tiptoed into the room.

"Hello, there! Who are you?" exclaimed the detective instantly, and as if he were just awakened from sleep.

"It is I—Pelluria," came the instant reply; and Nick breathed.

"It is lucky for you that you spoke quickly," he said. "In another instant you would have had a bullet through you. I was dreaming of our escape from prison. I thought that I was running like mad through the streets with a mob in pursuit of me—and just then you opened the door. What time is it?"

"Three o'clock."

"So late? I could swear that I have not been in bed more than fifteen minutes"—which would been swearing to the truth, although Pelluria did not know that.

"You have evidently slept soundly and well," said Pelluria.

"I always do that—when I compose myself to sleep. Tell me what has happened to you."

The detective left the bed, crossed the room, and lighted a cigar. Then he stuck his feet into a pair of Chinese slippers and seated himself in his pajamas in one of the easy chairs to listen.

"There has been the devil to pay to-night," said Pelluria, also helping himself to a cigar.

"Yes? How so?"

"Cagliostro has made an ass of himself."

"What! The chief? The great and only One?"

"Yes."

"How so?"

"He abducted Lucia Bel——"

"What?"

"It is true, comrade. He wished to marry her, old as he is. He wanted her, for the added power she would bring to him. He stole her and took her to the retreat of the Hundred and One."

"And is she his prisoner now?"

"No; she escaped."

"Ah! You rescued her."

"No, I did not. I only wish, though, that I had had the chance."

"You would have done so?"

"Certainly I would have done so."

"How, then, did she escape?"

"One of the watchmen aided her; but, for some reason, he offended her. At all events, she rapped him on the head with something and knocked the sense out of him, after which she chained him up in the same chains that had held her——"

"Do you mean to say that Cagliostro had her chained?"

"Yes; she chained him up, and then she made her escape. They searched everywhere for her, but she could not be found; and when we knew that she had made good her escape, five of us went to Cagliostro's house and told him about it."

"What did he have to say about it?"

"Nothing; but he will have one or more of us murdered, probably. Doubtless it will be me. He thinks that I set her at liberty. He said so."

"Bah! We will clip his wings—you and I, Pelluria—if he grows nasty."

Pelluria leaped to his feet in great excitement.

"Do you mean that, Spada?" he demanded.

"Yes; of course I mean it."

"Then there is only one way to accomplish it."

"How is that?"

"He must be prevented from attending the meeting to-morrow night, when you are to be made a member of the Hundred."

"Why?"

"If he attends that meeting he will order my execution. I know it. I have been thinking it over all the way home. To-morrow morning I intended to disappear; to go away. It would have spoiled your chances of becoming a member of the Hundred and One; but it would have saved my life—for a time at least."

"Listen to me," said Nick; "and reply directly to my questions."

"Yes."

"You have made arrangements for me to become a member to-morrow night?"

"Yes."

"And if Cagliostro attends that meeting, your life will be in danger?"

"I will be as good as dead already."

"Do you know where Cagliostro resides?"

"I have told you already that I have just come from his house."

"Do you know the interior of the house?"

"Perfectly."

The detective leaped to his feet and began putting on his clothing.

"There is yet time," he said.

"For what?" asked Pelluria.

"To make Cagliostro a prisoner."

"You would dare to do that?"

"We dare all things, Pelluria, when our lives are in danger."

"How will you do it?"

"We will take him out of his house and bring him here to this place."

"He has it thoroughly protected with burglar-alarms."

"Bah! They are as nothing when one knows ho to go around them. Where is his home?"

"In Madison Avenue, near Twenty-ninth Street."

"Good! Are you ready?"

"Shall I go in these rags?"

"Certainly. You look the hobo to perfection."

"But after we have captured him—if we succeed in doing it—what shall we do with him?"

"Bring him here, I told you."

"But we cannot carry him through the streets."

"Nonsense! Yes, we can. I know a way."

"How?"

"Listen. In Twenty-fourth Street, near Third Avenue, there is a stable where I am known. I have made use of the men there often. We will go there first. I will ask you to await me outside while I ring them up and get a hack and a driver I know. If he is well paid, he will do as I command without asking questions. He shall take us to the vicinity of Cagliostro's house. He will await us there. We will enter the house. We will go to Cagliostro's room, and I will chloroform him. Then, together, we will carry him down the stairs and out of the house so quietly that even his dog—if he has one—would not be awakened. Then we will place him in the carriage and we will bring him here."

"Why not put him out of the way at once and forever?"

"Ah! You have suggested it. Perhaps that may be as well. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Then let us go at once. There is not too much time before day will begin to dawn."

Pelluria waited in front of the Ashland House while Nick went to the stable he had indicated. He did know the proprietor and almost all of the drivers, and he had only to tell who he really was and what he wanted done, to get what he desired; and he also mentioned the driver to address him as Mr. Spada.

Then they drove away, picked up Pelluria, and were presently close to the house of Cagliostro.

Many of our readers have read of how Nick Carter enters houses before now, when it has become his duty to do so in the line of his profession.

The unlocking of the door with his magic picklock was a simple proposition; the cutting of the chain-bolt was as easily accomplished. Burglar-alarms are never attached to the great front doors of houses for the simple

assure that burglars never enter that way—and Nick Carter knew this.

They were not compelled to stop longer on the front steps than would have been the case had they been provided with a night-key; and they soon stood inside the hall.

"Now," whispered Nick, "where is this room located?"

"Directly over the front parlor."

"Good! Follow me."

They ascended the stairs swiftly and silently. They paused near the door of the room in which Cagliostro was sleeping long enough to hear the assuring sound of his snoring; then they entered it—or, rather, Nick did so.

He glided slowly to the bed where the man was sleeping, and he held a handkerchief that was saturated with chloroform close to his face.

After a little, when it had begun to take effect, he pressed the handkerchief down solidly over nostrils and lips, and held it there for a time; and then he called gently to his companion.

"Find me a blanket or a mackintosh to wrap him in, and do you take his clothing from the chair over at the other side of the room," he whispered; and then, when the blanket and the mackintosh were brought, Nick wrapped the insensible man within them, and lifted him from the bed as easily as though he were a child.

And so they passed down the stairs and out of the house, entered the carriage, and drove away.

"Why not kill him at once?" asked Pelluria, after they had driven a short distance.

"I was thinking of that," replied Nick.

"Let us do so, then."

"It does not require two of us to do it," said the detective, chuckling suggestively. "I will leave the carriage and go to my room. You can do the job alone."

He felt that Pelluria shuddered as he sat beside him.

"The driver knows you—and now he also knows me," breathed Pelluria.

"Very well," said Nick. "You may leave the carriage and go to our rooms. Await me there. Leave the rest to me."

"You will——"

"Yes, my friend. No questions. It is as well that we should not know too much. Get down and go and wait for me at our rooms. I should be there in an hour," and he shouted for the driver to stop.

A moment later he was driving on alone with the unconscious man in his charge; but after a little he leaned out and spoke to the driver again, and when the carriage stopped a second time it was in front of police headquarters in Mulberry Street; and there the driver went inside and presently returned with an inspector and two men.

Nick held a whispered conversation with the inspector without leaving the carriage; and, at its close, the two officers lifted Cagliostro from the carriage and carried him into the building, together with his bundle of clothing, while the detective was driven rapidly away again.

Just as dawn was breaking, he entered his rooms again, and found Pelluria there, walking up and down in great excitement.

"Calm yourself," said Nick placidly. "Cagliostro is where he will never harm you again, my friend."

CHAPTER XI.

THE LITTLE GIANT'S STARTLING PLOT.

Nick Carter was not compelled to tell Pelluria any lies, for the reason that there is an unwritten code of laws among criminals of Pelluria's class which prohibits the asking of leading questions where the reply would involve a confession.

The detective's remark, when he entered the room, was considered as final, and neither of them referred again to the unfortunate Cagliostro.

Pelluria believed that the man was dead, and that ere long his body would doubtless be found floating in the river; Nick knew that the man was safely a prisoner at headquarters, where he would be held secretly until Nick was ready to produce him for trial—for, reader, there are many cases, even in this free and enlightened country, where prisoners are held in that way, and when only the men who lock him up know of his hiding-place; to all others he has simply mysteriously disappeared.

After that the two men slept; at least, the detective did so, and it is supposed that Pelluria did the same.

It was noon when they awakened; but neither of them left the room until toward evening.

"Pelluria," said the detective, then, "it is as well that we should agree upon a place of meeting for to-night; a time and a place."

"You think we had better not go from here together, do you?" asked Pelluria.

"Most decidedly."

"Well, Spada, you are the best leader I ever knew. You seem always to know just what to do and exactly how to do it. So, now, if you will give your orders, I will obey them. And I wish to say right here that it shall be my effort to make you the chief of the Hundred and One."

"My dear Pelluria," said the detective, laughing, "I am already the chief."

"Already the chief! What do you mean?"

"Listen. You know how adept I am at disguises."

"Yes."

"Well, I have formulated a plan. I shall begin on you in a moment, and I will disguise you so that you will look exactly as I do now; so that, in fact, all who know Marco Spada will believe that you are he. You will not recognize the difference yourself, if you look into a mirror. Do you understand that?"

"Yes."

"Then, as soon as it is quite dark, I will send you out, and I will ask you to meet me at the door to the office of Cagliostro's warehouses at ten o'clock to-night—or, no, make it half-past ten."

"Ah! You know where that is."

"Certainly; else I could not promise to meet you there."

"And what then?"

"After you have gone I will shave off this mustache. I have grown tired of wearing it. Then I shall change my complexion so that I will look like an American." What Nick meant was that he would get rid of the stain on his face, hands, and body which made him resemble an Italian, but he did not explain that to Pelluria.

"Why will you do that?" asked the Italian.

"In order that I may carry out the remainder of my program."

"And what is that?"

"I discovered an excellent photograph of Cagliostro when we were at his house last night, and I shall use that for a copy."

"I do not understand."

"I intend to make myself so exactly like Cagliostro that the men who know him best will not suspect that I am not he."

"Can you do that?"

"Pelluria, I have never had a failure that is my profession."

"Indeed; but what good will it do you? You cannot get inside the retreat."

"Oh, yes, I can. I will prove it to you later."

"Spada, you are a mystery, even to me, who knows you so well."

"And I promise you that after to-night I will be a mystery no longer. You shall know all about me. Have I not helped you? Have I not assisted in your escape from prison? Have I not rid you of an enemy who would have had you murdered to-night?"

"Yes; you have done all that."

"I will do more. Now, get ready, and I will change you so that you will be another Marco Spada."

"And if I meet the police they will arrest me."

"Not at all, for you will not meet them. You will take a carriage from the nearest corner and you will drive at once to the Erie Basin. You will remain there until the hour of our meeting at the door of the office, when you will come forth to meet me. Will you do as I direct?"

"In everything, Spada. It is yours to command."

"Very good."

The transformation which the detective wrought in the appearance of Pelluria was wonderful; and when he had finished—after Pelluria had donned the clothing that Nick had worn as Spada—the likeness was complete; so much so that Pelluria exclaimed upon it the moment he saw his own reflection in the mirror.

"You will do," said Nick.

"Perfectly," admitted Pelluria.

"And now, you must go. I wish to be alone while I change myself into Cagliostro. But do not forget that when you meet me you will really think that I am Cagliostro, your enemy, so don't shoot me—eh?"

"No fear. I will know, since you have told me; and I now believe that you can do all the wonderful things in the world."

"That is right. Go now."

And Pelluria went.

As soon as the detective was alone, and a sufficient time had elapsed so that he was certain that Pelluria would not return, he bolted the door securely and then produced his secret telephone from its hiding-place under the floor of the alcove; and, again, when he lifted the receiver from the hook and stopped to listen, he heard the words:

"On deck!"

"Is Pete in the building?" asked the detective. Pete was the name agreed upon between him and the commissioner, and it meant the commissioner in person.

"Yes," came the reply. "He is in his private office."

"Go to him at once, then, and say that I want to talk with him without delay."

There was silence after that; five—ten minutes of it; and then the detective heard the voice of the commissioner.

"Hello, Nick!" he said.

"Hello, commissioner! I think I have got everything in readiness to work our little game to-night."

"You do? Really? So soon?"

"Yes."

"That is bully. Tell me about it."

"Do you know Cagliostro's warehouses, in Gowanus?"

"I know of them."

"Do you know where they are located?"

"Approximately—yes."

"The retreat, or den, of the main guys of the Black Hand—the father and mother of all different groups and branches of the society, is located there, or very near there."

"Good."

"It is known among the elect as 'Bellini's Home'; it is also known among the members as the 'Hundred and One.' Cagliostro—whose real name is Bellini—is the chief; or, as they call him, the 'One.' I suppose the inspector has told you that Cagliostro is already a prisoner at headquarters; eh?"

"Yes."

"As the meeting-place of the 'Hundred and One,' or, if not there, then at the home of Cagliostro, we will find all information about all the groups of the Black Hand, so that when we have routed out this nest of the old hands—of the ringleaders—there will be information in our hands which will make all the rest of the work dead easy. Do you understand that?"

"Yes."

"And we can gather them in one by one—I mean, group by group—as we want them. Of course there will be imitations of the work of the Black Hand afterward; but the society itself will have been destroyed."

"That is great work, Nick."

"And it is almost done."

"Now what do you wish me to do?"

"First, I want you to understand that when you and your men make your descent upon the place, I will appear to you in the guise of Cagliostro himself. I intend to make myself up as Cagliostro."

"And do you wish us to arrest you as we did once before?"

"No; for as soon as the proper moment comes, I shall throw aside my disguise, and you will see me as Nick Carter himself."

"That is good."

"Arrangements have been made for my initiation to the order to-night, so there will be a large attendance at the place. I rather think that almost all of the Hundred and —no, not the One, for he is already a prisoner—that almost all of the hundred members will be there so we can gobble the bunch."

"Yes."

"And I know a secret entrance to the place, so that I can meet you and your men and guide you directly into their lair, and upon them before they suspect your presence."

"That's fine."

"But you must bear in mind that every one of those Italians will be armed to the teeth. I will have no opportunity this time to fill their revolvers with blank cartridges. You must make your men understand that they have got to fight, and that somebody is likely to get hurt."

"All right. How many ought I to take with me—for I shall lead the raid myself?"

"Good! You had better take at least fifty. That will be all that we can handle to advantage, and besides we will take them so by surprise that we will have more than half of them down and out before any fighting is done to speak of."

"Are there as many as a hundred?"

"No; about sixty, I think. Now, I want your men to go, singly and in pairs, to the door of the office of Cagliostro's warehouse. I want the first one to arrive there promptly at eleven o'clock; and the last one must be there by a quarter before twelve. Do you understand that?"

"Perfectly."

"I will be there at the door, in the character of Cagliostro, to admit them. You had better be the first to arrive, yourself."

"I will be there first."

"I think that is all. If there is anything more, there will be time enough to tell you about it after you get there."

"Do you think there is any danger that the men may be seen approaching the warehouse?"

"There is a possibility; but I don't think it is likely; anyhow, we must take that chance."

"I might send them in plain clothes."

"No; I want them in uniform."

"All right. We will take the chance."

"Then, I will say good night until I see you at the warehouse."

"Yes. Good night—till then."

And then Nick Carter applied himself to the alteration in his appearance.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAST OF THE "HUNDRED AND ONE."

It was necessary for the detective to work rapidly, and this he did, and, by a little after nine o'clock, when he glanced at his reflection in the mirror, he was as perfect a representation of Cagliostro as if that individual in person had stood before the glass and looked at himself.

"It will do; it will do finely," he thought; and, after a little more delay, he put out his lights and started forth.

He timed himself so that he would arrive at the warehouses a little after ten, for he desired to be there a few moments before the time appointed for the meeting with Pelluria.

Once there, he picked the lock of the door and stepped inside. Then he drew the curtain a little, so that he could see out, and seated himself to wait for the Italian.

Presently he came.

Nick saw him approach the building cautiously, glancing around him apprehensively; and presently he took up his station near the door.

Then, without a word, the detective stepped quietly outside, and had placed one hand on Pelluria's shoulder before the latter suspected his presence.

The start that the Italian gave then would have been ludicrous had Nick chosen to view it so; for Pelluria leaped backward with an oath, and his hand flew to the pocket where he carried a weapon.

For an instant, the man really thought that it was Cagliostro who stood before him.

But the detective laughed softly, and said:

"It is all right, Pelluria. Come inside."

When they were in the office, Nick turned on the lights, and then he asked:

"Pelluria, are you armed?"

"Yes; of course."

"How?"

"With a revolver and a knife."

"Let me see them."

Pelluria obediently produced them, and gave them into Nick Carter's hands; and the detective quietly placed them on the table behind him.

"Pelluria," he said, when the latter evinced his surprise at the act, "I have something to tell you. It will not be pleasant for you to hear, but you must listen. And first, I wish to assure you that I am not going to injure you, and that I am not going to send you back to prison. I am, in fact, going to give you your liberty—but it will be on the condition that you return to Italy and remain there for the rest of your days, or that you go to Australia and never return to America."

Pelluria's jaw had dropped in dismay. He did not reply. He could not. He could only gasp incoherently; but at last he managed to exclaim:

"Who are you?"

"Pelluria—I am Nick Carter."

"Great Heaven!"

"Do you comprehend now all that you have been unable to understand?"

The man could only nod his head in an affirmative.

"Listen to me," said Nick. "I have in a sense made you my friend. You have been the unconscious instrument of my success in this venture of mine against the Black Hand, and I am not one to send you to prison for that, no matter what you have done. As I said a moment ago, I intend to let you go entirely free on condition that you leave this country forever."

"I will do so; I swear it."

"Very good. Now, I shall handcuff you, and tie you so that you cannot escape until all my work is done. I shall also gag you so that you cannot call out; but, after those others are captured, I will secretly set you at liberty. Do you understand, and do you believe me?"

"Yes."

"Here is the gag, ready-made. You have used your own handkerchief around it. So. That is right. Now

put your hands behind you. There. The handcuffs are snapped upon your wrists. Now sit in that chair. I will shackle each of your ankles to the legs of it; so. That is good. And now, with this rope, I bind you—so."

Nick wound the rope round and round the man's body and around the chair until he was trussed up so that there was no possibility of his escaping; and then he fixed the gag in place.

"I am sorry to make you so uncomfortable," he said; "but it is only for a short time."

He saw then that Pelluria wished to say something, so he loosened the gag.

"You do not know how to get into the retreat without me," said Pelluria then.

"Oh, yes, I do. I need no further assistance. I was there last night. It was I who rescued Lucia Bellini;" and he replaced the gag, after which he picked up chair and man together, and carried them into the secret room where he and Lucia had hidden from their pursuers.

Then he returned to the office and put out the lights, after which he awaited the arrival of the commissioner and his men.

Promptly at eleven o'clock he saw the commissioner approaching, and he opened the door to admit him without waiting for him to knock.

Then, a few minutes later, the policemen began to arrive.

They came in ones and two, as Nick had directed, and they seemed to loom out of the darkness from nowhere at all, so carefully had the commissioner directed them.

And when, a little before the appointed time for the last arrival, Nick found that they were all there, he conducted them silently into that secret room, lighted the gas, and inspected them.

"Commissioner," he said, "you have certainly brought me a fine lot of men. I know most of you, boys," he added to them. "Many of you know me—or you would know me if I were not in this disguise."

"You are Nick Carter," exclaimed one of them; and Nick bowed and smiled.

"Yes," he said; "and I have got some work for you to do. Now listen, and I will give you the necessary instructions."

* * * * * * * *

At midnight precisely, after the detective had shown the commissioner the way through the cellar to the retreat of the "Hundred and One," and given all the necessary instructions concerning what the fifty policemen were to do and when they were to do it, he assembled them in the great square room of the warehouse, near the top of the stairs to the cellar, and then, with the jocular remark that he would see them all later, he descended the stairs alone and made his way through the tunnel that has already been described, to the nestlike place that was hidden away inside the hulks of the old and supposed to be abandoned canal-boats.

He came out into the little square room with the four doors—and he paused there long enough to glance into the rooms to the right and the left.

Perceiving that nobody was in either of them, he lost no time in opening the fourth—the one that was directly opposite that which had admitted him.

He entered—as he had supposed he would—a long, narrow, low-ceilinged room.

Down through the center of it extended a long table, and on either side of this table he saw the members of the Hundred and One.

With a quick glance—while they were rising in their places to greet their supposed chief—he counted them rapidly; and he saw in that glance that there were thirty men on each side of the table, and one other at the extreme—sixty-one in all; and he also saw in that same glance, that the seat at this end of the table was evidently reserved for Cagliostro.

When he entered, the men rose in their places and stood silently before him. It was evident that they expected something of him, and that he would make a break if he did not do the correct thing; but, fortunately, he had foreseen this condition of affairs and had made his arrangements accordingly.

Five minutes would not elapse before the policemen would rush pell-mell into the place; and, therefore, all he had to do was to dispose of those five minutes without in the meantime arousing the suspicions of the men before him.

And in that instant he remembered Lucia Bellini.

"Who was it," he demanded, in Italian, "who permitted my prisoner to escape?"

There was no answer. Utter silence was the only reply.

"Where is the man Pelluria?" he demanded, then.

Again there was silence; and, after waiting a moment,

Nick heard the sound of a footfall in the little room behind him, and he knew that the policemen were on hand, ready for his signal.

He waited yet another moment, and then, stepping back, he threw open the door behind him, and, at the same time, drawing two revolvers, he presented them toward the men at the table.

"Hands up!" he called out. "And the man who refuses to obey is a dead one!"

At the same instant there was a rush from behind him, and blue-coated officers crowded through the doors.

They came so rapidly and so unexpectedly that more than a score of them were inside the room before the sixty men who were standing around the table had recovered from their astonishment.

Then a shot was fired suddenly—by the man at the opposite end of the table; and it was the signal for a general mix-up.

But the policemen rushed the Italians at once.

There was a hail of shots from both sides. Many men went down upon the floor groaning. Nick Carter felt the wind made by that first bullet as it grazed his cheek, and another passed through the sleeve of his coat. Then the table was overturned, and there was a horde of men struggling on the floor.

But the lights did not go out; and the few Italians who sought to escape by rushing the door only met other policemen there, and were quickly overpowered.

The policemen fought with their fists and clubs instead of with their revolvers, and they created havoc among the Italians, who, doubtless, thought that there was an army of officers attacking them; and then, almost as suddenly as the fight began, it came to a close.

And then, Nick Carter, standing at the head of the long table while the officers held the Black Hand horde in check, removed his disguise. He threw aside the impedimenta which had made him in the likeness of Cagliostro, and stood revealed in his own proper person—Nick Carter, the great detective.

"You all know me!" he shouted. "I am Nick Carter. The game is up. Your chief is a prisoner! Surrender, all of you!"

And so ended the fight.

The following day, the three canal-boats were blown up with dynamite; the tunnel was destroyed, and the old warehouses were searched from top to bottom.

Among the records found in the house of Cagliostro was a complete list of the "Groups" of the Black Hand, together with lists of names of their members, and the commissioner lost no time in rounding them all up; and, to-day, the Italians who terrorize their neighbors under the name of the Black Hand are only impostors, who are existing on the reputation of the original society.

It is well to add that later Nick Carter called upon Lucia Bellini, and told her who he really was; and it is also well to say that they remained excellent friends.

Nick kept his word with Pelluria. He was sent to Australia, and Nick Carter supplied the funds to take him there.

THE END.

The next number, 473, will contain "An Expert in Craft; or, Nick Carter and the Jewel Thieves."

About the Early Numbers of

Tip Top Weekly

We receive hundreds of letters every week from readers asking if we can supply the early numbers of Tip Top containing Frank's adventures. In every case we are obliged to reply that numbers 1 to 300 are entirely out of print.

We would like to call the attention of our readers to the fact that the Frank Merriwell Stories now being published in book form in the Medal Library are inclusive of these early numbers. The first book to appear was No. 150 entitled "Frank Merriwell's Schooldays."

We give herewith a complete list of all the stories that have been published in book form up to the time of writing. We will be glad to send a fine colored cover catalogue of the Medal Library which is just filled with good things for boys, upon receipt of a one-cent stamp to cover postage.

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